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ABSTRACT

Scripts of public radio programs on educational concerns and specifically on the topic of entering college are presented. The following scripts are included: "Mother Helps Her Daughter to Move into Her New Dorm Room:" "Another Student Talks About Her Hopes and Fears as She Packs:" "One Student Can't Even Get His Key to Unlock His Room:" "A Young Woman Who Already Misses Home:" "Psychologist Michael Stadder:" "Parents Describe Their Feelings of Loss:" "Two Young Women Discuss the Importance of Living with a Compatible Roommate:" "Michael Stadder on How Today's Freshman Class Is Different from That of Ten Years Ago:" "A Group of Students:" "Vice President of Student Affairs, Bruce Poynter:" "A Resident Advisor Tells of a New Freshman:" "Class Roll Call:" "Albert Shanker on School Money Problems:" "Tom Shannon of the National School Boards Association:" "Education Secretary Shirley Hufstedler Says Those Rules Are Crucial:" "Teacher Reading Roll:" "Terry Herndon of the National Education Association:" "According to Al Shanker It Is the Other Children Who Lose Out When Handicapped Kids Are Mainstreamed:" "Kids Finding Their Way in Their New School:" "Tom Shannon and Terry Herndon Discuss Whether or Not Today's Schools Are Outmoded:" and "Stan Salett of the National Committee for Citizens in Education." (SW)

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BACK TO SCHOOL, Parts I&II, PROGRAM NOS. 264-265

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"BACK TO SCHOOL, PART ONE"

STUDENT: When I was a freshman, the university at that time had a rule that all freshmen should wear beanies, to set them aside from other students, and I think one of the best things that my roommate and I decided was that we're not going to wear these beanies, we feel set aside enough and we're not going to do that.

MERROW: Although most of today's college freshmen don't have to wear beanies, they'll still feel set apart, away from home, family and friends, starting a new life.

MOTHER HELPS HER DAUGHTER TO MOVE INTO HER NEW DORM ROOM

REINHARDT: What is all this, boxes of things?

MOTHER: Yes. We're unpacking.

REINHARDT: I see one box that's got deodorant, shampoo.

MOTHER: Backgammon. Tennis rackets. Posters. Sweaters. A few other things.

REINHARDT: Lots of hangers.

MOTHER: Lots of hangers. Lots of clothes. She's not going to -- her whole life is in this trunk.

DAUGHTER: That's depressing. That's a depressing thought, my whole life is in one car.

MERROW: She's one of this year's four and a half million college freshmen who will face the excitement and sometimes loneliness of the first year of college.

REINHARDT: Only about half the freshmen will graduate in the usual four years. At the school we visited, almost a quarter won't be back next year. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, for NPR's Options in Education. On this edition, a visit to some freshmen at a mid-sized private college, American University in Washington, D. C.

REINHARDT: Assistant Producer Rebecca Goldfield and I spent a couple of days at freshmen orientation, beginning with kids moving into the dorms.

ANOTHER STUDENT TALKS ABOUT HER HOPES AND FEARS AS SHE PACKS

STUDENT: Well, I brought my stereo, my television, my table, my

clock, all my clothes, all my stuffed animals, all my books, all my albums and records.

GOLDFIELD: How are you going to fit all that here?

STUDENT: I don't know. I'm used to staying by myself. Well, I guess I'll just have to make space with what I have.

GOLDFIELD: Maybe you'll be lucky and you'll get a roommate who doesn't have anything at all.

STUDENT: I hope she comes with just herself, no clothes, no nothing, and I can take over the space and use it for myself.

GOLDFIELD: You'll be living very closely with this person that you don't know at all.

STUDENT: I know. But it's like I went to camp for like four summers, and we had to do with like three others, we had to live close with, so I just hope we get along, because I think like she'll be the closest thing to me and I think she'll be the most important thing to me, especially my first year, my roommate.

GOLDFIELD: Do you know that just about half the people who start school as freshmen this year will not graduate within four years? They'll graduate some other time or they'll drop out or whatever. Do you think that you'll be one of those who graduates, or what?

STUDENT: I definitely feel I'll graduate, but I've heard that, that a lot of the freshmen kids, they get so caught up in anxiety and nervousness and doing well and, you know, being able to fit in with everybody and making friends, that they just go crazy. They like lose all, you know, their state of mind. But I know that at home I've always, you know, been good in school and I've always been able to make friends, and I think that this should be just like it. It's just like starting from scratch. But I feel if you could do it once you could do it before.

GOLDFIELD: What did you leave behind? You told me what you brought with you. What's behind that you are going to miss?

STUDENT: A lot of close friends, a boy friend.

GOLDFIELD: You left your boy friend to come to school?

STUDENT: Well, I was going to leave anyway, so we just -- we parted.

GOLDFIELD: Was that a hard thing to do?

STUDENT: Yeah, but it would have been even harder if I had to stay with him. But a lot of close friends, a lot of close friends. But I hope to make the same friends here, you know, just as close friends here.

GOLDFIELD: What about living away from home?

STUDENT: I'm so excited I can't believe it.

GOLDFIELD: Is that one of the main things for you, that you're finally going to have a chance to live just the way you like?

STUDENT: Well, I want to see how it is to be on my own, because I know how I am at home, and I could be a little lazy and my mother's still there to do things. Now it's me, so I guess if I don't want to get it done it's just not going to get done unless I do it myself. That's the biggest point here, whatever you want to do has to be done by yourself.

GOLDFIELD: But you'll be having meals prepared for you and someone to come in and clean up your room for you here?

STUDENT: No, I'm not on meal plan.

GOLDFIELD: You're not?

STUDENT: No. And I plan to do all my own cleaning. I didn't do it at home. I have to do it here. But I'm not on meal plan. I'd rather just, you know, see how I am with cooking too, because from here I should be going into my own apartment, you know, maybe in the next year or two, so I have to learn the experience sometime.

GOLDFIELD: Do you have any doubt that you'll succeed in your studies this year?

STUDENT: None at all. None at all. I mean it'll be a little hard, I guess, to learn how to juggle college work, which I've never experienced before, with having a social life and being able to take care of like shopping and cleaning and doing my own stuff, but I feel I can -- I feel I'll be able to handle it.

This is going to be my bed. I decided I'm taking the left bed. I'm taking the desk right next to the left bed and I'm taking that, the closet space at the left side of the room.

<u>ONE STUDENT CAN'T EVEN GET HIS KEY TO UNLOCK HIS ROOM</u>

STUDENT: Okay. 208. Okay. Why don't I just bust down that door?

GOLDFIELD: Are you starting out with the wrong key? Definitely the wrong key. You just came to your room and you can't even get the door open.

STUDENT: Can't even get the door open.

GOLDFIELD: Do you worry that that's a bad omen for this year?

STUDENT: Yes, I do.

GOLDFIELD: What are some of the other things you might be worried about?

STUDENT: Once I get in will I be able to get out.

GOLDFIELD: Out of the room?

STUDENT: Yes.

GOLDFIELD: Do you know anything about your roommate, who it is and --

STUDENT: No, I don't, not yet. I can't even get in the room, much less my roommate.

A YOUNG WOMAN WHO ALREADY MISSES HOME

GOLDFIELD: I wonder if I could ask you a few questions.

STUDENT: If I can answer them.

GOLDFIELD: Is this sort of a tough time for you?

STUDENT: Yes, it is.

GOLDFIELD: What are the things you're thinking about?

STUDENT: Friends at home. My boy friend.

GOLDFIELD: You had to leave him.

STUDENT: Yes.

GOLDFIELD: Do you have any feeling you'll be able to see him when you go back home?

STUDENT: Yes.

GOLDFIELD: How often will that be?

STUDENT: Well, he goes to school at Duke, so he's only about

three hours away.

GOLDFIELD: How did you decide to come here, even though you felt that much, that strongly for him?

STUDENT: Well, you know, it's funny, because I've waited to go to college for like three years, and I'm so glad to be here, but I'm just a little upset, that's all.

GOLDFIELD: Do you think -- do you have any -- can you see ahead and imagine how you'll remember this day?

STUDENT: I'll probably laugh. Probably laugh. I know I'll laugh.

GOLDFIELD: Do you know anybody else here?

STUDENT: Yes. But I have no idea where they are. One close friend will arrive tomorrow. He's transferring. So I'm excited to see him.

GOLDFIELD: In the meantime, what are you going to do today?

STUDENT: I have no idea, no idea.

PSYCHOLOGIST MICHAEL STADDER

STADDER: It's one thing for me to think I know I'm going to college, I know I'm going to have to be on my own. I'm going to have to make some difficult individual decisions and I think it will be a good experience. It's another thing to be staring at four walls with a perfect stranger sitting next to you who's your roommate, who you're not even sure you got his name right, and looking at all of these new classes that you have coming up the next day.

MERROW: Michael Stadder, American University psychologist, has been counselling college students for eight years.

STADDER: I say to a student who's going through real acute homesickness, look at it as a crisis. Look, this is a major, very, very difficult crisis in your life. So many of the important supports that you've had you don't have right now, so no wonder you're feeling so crummy. No wonder you're feeling so bad. But like in any crisis, the way to get through it is to not try to plan out how you're going to feel in a week or two weeks or three weeks, but the old cliche of taking it a step at a time, take it a day at a time. What can you plan out today that will help you get through today. And then let's worry about tomorrow. So really taking it on a day to day basis, even an hour to hour or minute by minute basis.

REINHARDT: Can you tell beforehand which students are likely to have the greatest problems?

STADDER: Not really. Sometimes it will be the student who is expressing fears during orientation week. Other times, it's the students you referred to before who are seeming the cockiest about they're not going to have any problem. Sometimes it's helpful to talk about that anxiety right when you're there and then you can blow it off a little bit. But no, I don't think that I or anybody can accurately predict which particular students are going to have those problems.

REINHARDT: What's it like for parents?

STADDER: I think often it's as difficult if not moreso for parents than it is for the student. When you may ride past the dormitories in any college campus when the freshmen students are saying goodbye. It's not just the students who are perhaps in tears. It's often the parents and sometimes only the parents that are crying. It really for many parents starts a new chapter in their lives, a real definite sign of having to say goodbye to their child and say hello to dealing with another adult, and someone that they can't always say to them, well, did you do your schoolwork, or did you clean up your room, and that's a real loss, and it's very tough, I think, for many parents.

REINHARDT: Are you saying that the mother, for instance, will have to spend more of her time now dealing with the father than she did even when the child was there?

STADDER: I think so. It may be a family where this is the last child to go away, and then the emptiness syndrome of the parents now have to deal with each other, and they haven't had to do that with just the two of them for maybe 20 years.

REINHARDT: Do sometimes people spend their time talking with each other actually talking through the children?

STADDER: Sure. And a child sometimes plays a role in the family as either referree or as you say, tell your father what I think about this. And when that intermediary isn't there anymore, it causes a whole new readjustment period. I think the freshman year, we've been focusing on students, is a real tough adjustment period. But it's often equally as tough for many parents.

MERROW: Michael Stadder, Director of the Center for Psychological and Learning Services at American University. Rebecca and Barbara asked parents for their reactions to separation from their children.

PARENTS DESCRIBE THEIR FEELINGS OF LOSS

PARENT: Very, very difficult.

GOLDFIELD: Is this the first -- it's not the first time?

PARENT: We have another daughter here at American University.

GOLDFIELD: And have you got any children left at home?

PARENT: We have no more children left. These are our only two. And it's very, very difficult, especially for my wife.

GOLDFIELD: So you're going home to an empty house now.

PARENT: Except for a dog, yes.

GOLDFIELD: Knowing that it's so difficult, why did you encourage, allow, whatever, have your child come here?

PARENT: Probably for the reason that I never had the opportunity, nor did my wife. I went to school, I lived home. I went to college for eight years, I lived home, and even I lived home after I got married, for a year and a half, so my parents didn't lose me until I was well into my 20s, and we're two -- we're still young people and both of our children are gone. You can see it's difficult.

GOLDFIELD: But you didn't try to stop your daughters.

PARENT: No. I would not stop them. I would allow them to grow on their own. It's not something I felt was fair to do.

REINHARDT: Your daughter is here?

PARENT: Yes.

REINHARDT: Is this the first time she's been away from home?

PARENT: Yes, it is the first time she has been away from home.

REINHARDT: Are there certain things that you and she do together that you'll miss?

PARENT: Yes. For example, she likes fine arts and she plays the piano a lot, and I love listening to her playing and singing. I'm going to miss her at home.

REINHARDT: Your folks were here yesterday. Have they left already?

STUDENT: Yes, they have.

REINHARDT: When did they leave?

STUDENT: They left around 7:00 o'clock last night.

REINHARDT: What happened when they left? What -- how did you feel? How did they react to the whole thing?

STUDENT: Well, my mother was pretty upset. I'm the oldest one and she didn't want me to leave. She was -- she realizes that I have to, but the motherly instinct told her that she didn't want to lose me, but it's a fact of life. And I hated to see them go, but I'm excited about school and everything, and I wasn't as upset as they were.

REINHARDT: What actually happened as they were leaving?

STUDENT: My mother cried. My father was fine. My brother just waved, and I waved.

REINHARDT: When the families leave, what next?

MERROW: The student's roommate may well become the most important person in the freshman's life, for the first few weeks anyway. This student has been through it.

TWO YOUNG WOMEN DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING WITH A COMPATIBLE ROOMMATE

STUDENT: The thing I was most nervous about was my roommate. When she came into the room and she was opening the door, I was just sitting on the bed and looking, you know. I just wanted to -- I was afraid what she would look like.

REINHARDT: What she would look like? Do you remember what actually happened?

STUDENT: Well, I was with my parents and I was sitting on the bed, and we were just waiting, and the door slowly opened and then I just looked and -- I was nervous. I thought I would get some fat slob. I didn't know what to expect. I was nervous about that. I can just imagine what the kids are going through now. I wouldn't want to come to school now and just -- with all these people and confusion and everyone running around and no-one knows where to go.

REINHARDT: If you had gotten a bad roommate, somebody that you wouldn't have gotten along with, what would it have been like?

STUDENT: A horror scene. I would have just -- I don't know what I would have done. I would have just -- I think there's ways that you can change your roommate.

REINHARDT: Is a roommate that important?

STUDENT: I think so, definitely.

REINHARDT: You were the roommate that she was waiting for. What was

your reaction when you opened the door?

STUDENT: Well, I didn't know who was going to be sitting there either, so I was just as nervous. But my ideas of a person weren't as cruel as hers. I -- you know, I just wanted somebody I was going to get along with. Because like you spend -- the first day everybody wants somebody to walk around with and to meet people with, and if you don't get along it's kind of hard doing it on your own. So having somebody there is really good.

REINHARDT: What's it like being the second person into a room?

STUDENT: Well, it's really no big deal if you get along. But I guess if you don't get along, everything she did when she first got there would have been a catastrophe, like I don't like her so why did she get that bed, why did she pick that whatever. But since we got along it was no big deal. I didn't care what she did and she didn't care what I did, so it made it a lot easier.

MERROW: Having a compatible roommate is important beyond those first few days of setting up house and exploring the campus. Psychologist Michael Stadder.

MICHAEL STADDER ON HOW TODAY'S FRESHMAN CLASS IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF TEN YEARS AGO

STADDER: Most students, if you ask them who was the most important person to you when you first came to campus, in making it either a good or a bad experience, most students I believe would say, "My roommate." Why is it so important? Well, that's who you live with. At home, for example, many students may have their own room, and no matter how bad the world has been to them that day, they can get away from the room -- they can get away into the room, and just be by themselves, have some privacy.

With a roommate, you don't have that degree of privacy and you need to work out on a day to day, 24 hour basis how to chisel out a little part of that room or a little part of my own life that can be private and somewhat safe, to get away from the other slings and arrows that are hitting you.

REINHARDT: So you're just saying if you actually work that out, if you go through that together successfully, you have some kind of bond which you wouldn't have had otherwise.

STADDER: I think so, absolutely. Certainly it's a real chance for growth and development. It's also an enormous source of strain and in many ways you take pot luck. You don't know who your roommate is going to be and the personality mix may be great, it may be the best friend you'll have for the rest of your life. It may be terrible, and it may make that transition from high school to college all the more

tough.

REINHARDT: You've been counselling students for eight years. How are these freshmen different from the freshmen you saw eight years ago?

STADDER: A couple of differences, I think. One is they seem to be much more worried about their jobs, and I think that's accurate. Back in the early '70s, late '60s, there wasn't as much of a problem about getting a job. They seem much more serious academically about getting the courses, the material down, and I think that does have to do with jobs.

REINHARDT: Even at the freshman level?

STADDER: Yeah, very much, even at the freshman level. You might be surprised at how many students are coming in now with their life plan already laid out, about I definitely want to be a certified public accountant, or I definitely want to be a doctor, and so forth. Many do not have a definite major in mind yet, but I think the economy and the pressure to succeed that I think students are perhaps feeling moreso now than they felt, oh, eight years ago, is causing that.

One thing that the competition in the anticipated job market produces is seeing other students not necessarily as potential friends but as potential competitors, and that can make it somewhat tougher.

REINHARDT: Do you find yourself seeing more problems, emotional problems, because of that pressure?

STADDER: I wouldn't say more problems, but I'd say somewhat different problems. I think compared to eight years ago there are less problems with different kinds of extremely serious drug use. On the other hand, I think alcohol abuse among students today is as much of a problem if not moreso as it was back eight years ago. So that's a problem that was moreso before, somewhat, the issue of drug abuse, than I think it is right now.

REINHARDT: But you're saying alcohol -- well, go ahead and finish that.

STADDER: But I would say that competitive issues in college are much more of a difficult issue and much more of a cause for bringing a student into a center like ours than it would have been maybe eight years ago. Eight years ago a student might more likely have been coming in because of some bad drug reaction, or more likely to come in primarily because of a personal relationship problem.

REINHARDT: It almost sounds as if you're saying today's students might study better, might do better in school, but might, because of

competitiveness or pressure, have more difficulty just getting along.

STADDER: I think that's true. I think they, in some ways, might be somewhat more serious students, but in some other ways might not be as serious about learning about the other parts of life that you can get from college that you don't learn in the classroom. There's so much pressure that's felt, I think, with the competition, as we've been talking about it, in the academic arena, in the eventual job arena, that it kind of cuts the rest of that off.

Now, I think it's a mistake, though, to assume that just because that pressure's there they're going to be better students, because sometimes that pressure makes them less good students. The pressure is so intense that they don't do well on tests. A moderate level of tension or anxiety is the best level to have if you want to do well on a test. If you don't have much tension, you're not going to take it very seriously. If you have too much, you're not going to be able to think and concentrate as well as possible.

REINHARDT: Can you give me an example of a student who -- perhaps a freshman who came in last year and had these kinds of problems. What was it like for him?

STADDER: Well, let's say a freshman who came in after his first midterm, and let's say it was in chemistry and that he wanted to go to medical school. He may come in terribly panicked, heart palpitations, can't sleep, can't concentrate, feels fidgety, antsey, very irritable, all of that.

REINHARDT: Real physical symptoms.

STADDER: Physical symptoms, right, real strong anxiety attack, if you will. "Why are you feeling so badly?" "Well, I got a C in chemistry, and that means to me this. I probably will get a C for the rest of the semester in this course because, after all, I can't expect that I'm going to do better than this one test. That's a good sign. And if I don't get better than C in this course, why can I expect I'll get better than a C in the rest of my chemistry classes. If that happens, I'm not going to get into medical school, and if that happens, I won't get the internship at Mass. General."

REINHARDT: Isn't he right, though?

STADDER: No, he's wrong, because the first test is not a very good sample of how you're going to do in college. A way to look at the first couple of days, even the first semester or year of college, is that you're going through a very difficult, maybe the most difficult adjustment period in your life. If you got crummy grades in the first semester or the first year, certainly the first test, it just may mean you're working through that whole adjustment period, that whole

transition. You know more now, and when you take the next test, when you take the next course, you may well do much better. That's certainly the experience of many, many students.

REINHARDT: It's difficult, though, when you're going through that transition, to realize you're going through a hard time. You feel as if you should -- "I'm a student. I should be able to do as well now as anytime."

STADDER: Absolutely. You know, just yesterday I was training some freshmen orientation aides, undergraduates, to help freshmen with this whole orienation week, and I asked them, "If you had one piece of advice to give incoming freshmen that would have made your own freshman transition easier, what would it be?" The most common answer was, "I'd say to them that it's okay to make mistakes." And if they can take some of that pressure off, realize that they're in a totally new situation, there's no way that they're going to avoid making mistakes, that can be very helpful.

MERROW: Psychologist Michael Stadder.

A GROUP OF STUDENTS

GOLDFIELD: Did any of you ever think about not going straight out of high school, taking a year to travel, to work, to do nothing?

GROUP RESPONSE: Not at all, no.

GOLDFIELD: Well, is it an unreasonable idea? Why did you all just go straight ahead?

STUDENT: I just felt it wasn't for me. I knew what I wanted to do with my life, and I felt the only way to do it was to go and get a higher education, go to college.

GOLDFIELD: Did anybody here come not with the idea of having a good job when they get out, rather just want the chance to explore the music of Chopin, the writings of Nietzsche and the physics of Einstein, just want to find out about all this stuff?

GROUP RESPONSE: No.

GOLDFIELD: Nobody did. You call came knowing --

STUDENT: I came set to go towards political science, go out, graduate, work in the political field. You know, campaign. I've been working for my Congressman for a year on a program in high school, and I'm going to continue working for him down here. And that's like I just want to continue along with that, and then maybe get a job on his staff, get a job on someone else's staff, go into the State Department.

I don't care. Just get into politics.

GOLDFIELD: One thing strikes me. I mean you're all pretty young and ambitious. You seem to know exactly what you're doing and when. Where's the time to just explore, you know, think things over?

STUDENT: -- last year with politics and with stuff like that, and I learned then, because I got active politically. That was my exploring. Now this is my doing.

MERROW: Many kids come to school not only knowing what they'll major in, but also seeming to have their whole lives planned. Does being so sure make them better students? Vice-President of Student Life, Bruce Poynter.

VICE-PRESIDENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS, BRUCE POYNTER

POYNTER: If better students means students more attuned to working hard to get good grades, I think it does. We have a definite upswing, for example, in such measurable things as library use, a significant upswing in library use. We have installed study lounges in all of our dormitories, and these are heavily used. As a matter of fact, where our dormitories at one time were described as zoos, they're anything but zoos now, and people are living in there now and they're studying in there and so forth. There's that real difference.

Now, whether there is the same readiness to question ideas today or not, there I'm not so sure. And of course education is kind of a balancing off of the receiving of the knowledge of one's forbears, and the questioning of that knowledge. And we certainly don't want to lose sight of that latter. The questioning was absolutely in ascendency in 1970, absolutely. And today the other seems to be in ascendence, and it's a question, I think, of balancing these.

REINHARDT: What do you think we've done to our children, the students, the freshmen, to discourage them from questioning?

POYNTER: I'm sure I don't know all the answers to that. I do think that possibly part of the answer has to do with the economic circumstances of our time. They do not want to be out there selling pencils. They see the need to get the kinds of employment that are going to put food on their table, and the signals that we're giving them are those that encourage them to -- you know, to soak up the knowledge, so that they'll be prepared to present a good looking transcript to an employer and answer the questions the right way.

REINHARDT: What do you think is lost to society after these freshmen graduate, if they don't start questioning?

POYNTER: Possibly a certain liveliness, a certain -- oh, what's the

word I'm groping for here? Vitality. I think not only a university, but by extension a society is a more interesting place if you have people who are constantly out there on the growing edge, which means raising questions about things, all kinds of things.

MERROW: Bruce Poynter, Vice-President of Student Life at American University in Washington, D. C.

REINHARDT: In the second part of this report, back to public school.

MERROW: If you want a printed transcript of the two programs, send us two dollars. The cassette recording costs six dollars.

REINHARDT: Write us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: The printed transcript of both programs, $2.00. The cassette recording, $6.00. And our address again, National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

REINHARDT: Ask for a free list of past Options in Education programs when you write.

MERROW: And please tell us the call letters of your own local NPR station.

A RESIDENT ADVISOR TELLS OF A NEW FRESHMAN

ADVISOR: All of a sudden they're here and parents are gone, and they can't sleep. I had a student come to me last -- this morning, who couldn't sleep last night, and is walking around, literally you can see this person shaking, because they're just so anxious about everything. And there's so much for them to do, and the university is feeding out the information in a good way, but there's so much of it, and the fact that all of a sudden the umbilical cord is cut and they're sort of lost.

REINHARDT: Options in Education is a co-production of National Public Radio and the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University.

MERROW: Principal support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: John Merrow is the Producer of Options in Education. Mary Rouse is our Associate Producer and Rebecca Goldfield is our Assistant Producer, with engineering assistance by Skip Peasey and Renee Pringle.

ADVISOR: Within the first few days, a lot of that anxiety will disappear. They're in a whole new social setting and they're trying

to deal with that, and that's -- it's very tough on adults, let alone young adults. So once they start to feel comfortable with their roommates and with their new social setting, and with scheduling and learning how to deal with American University as with any other university, they'll start to feel a little more comfortable.

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR, National Public Radio.

Program No. 265: "Back to School, Part Two"

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"BACK TO SCHOOL, PART TWO"

CLASS ROLL CALL

TEACHER: Linda McCavity, Mc, C-a-v-i-t-y? Christopher McGear, Mc, G-e-a-r. Sylvia Minker, M-i-n-k-e-r. The first name is W-a-i-t-h-i-r-a, and the last name is N-g-a-i-n-e. Next, Lynette P-a-l-m-q-u-i-s-t.

REINHARDT: He's unfamiliar with those students' names because the kids are new to the school. They're seventh graders and it's their first day.

TEACHER: Andrew Persette. Sonia Porter. Christopher, S-t-a-v-e-l-y, Stavely, I guess it is. Severn S-t-e-l-b-r-e. Yolanda Tillman. Helen Y-a-s-i-l-i-o-u. And Stephen Zich, Z-i-c-h.

MERROW: Those seventh graders are among the 46 million kids, kindergarten through high school, who are starting a new school year.

REINHARDT: Seeing their old friends. Making new ones.

MERROW: Swapping stories. Claiming desks and lockers, wondering about their new teachers. I'm John Merrow.

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt for NPR's Options in Education. It's a new school year for the folks who run schools too, but not everything is new. They'll find themselves plagued with some of last year's problems.

ALBERT SHANKER ON SCHOOL MONEY PROBLEMS

SHANKER: Budget, money, layoffs, cutbacks, budget squeezes, tax propositions.

MERROW: These are all money.

SHANKER: They're all money, yes.

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker is President of the American Federation of Teachers, a teacher union.

SHANKER: Well, schools are opening. They're opening in a period of very high unemployment and they're opening in a period when federal budgets have been cut in order to balance the budget, and therefore we have layoffs in all of the major cities across the country, and we have states which must provide money for the unemployed and are not collecting taxes from the unemployed, so that this kind of national tightness in terms of educational money that we haven't found over the last decade. The schools are being squeezed because other priorities come first, namely feeding people who are unemployed, housing them, or in big cities

where they have to cut back their budgets and they start thinking, where can we cut? Well, nobody wants to get killed, so don't cut the police. They don't want their homes to burn down, so don't touch fire. They want the garbage picked up, so don't touch that. Those are things that touch everybody, garbage, fires, police, but schools only touch those parents who have children in school. They should touch everybody because these children will be -- are part of our environment and will continue to be part of the environment. But they're not viewed that way, and politically it's easier to cut back on schools than on almost any other social service, except for maybe libraries.

MERROW: My son starts junior high school, in public school, here in Washington, and I talked to the principal this morning and he said, "Well, I just got word today that I'm losing two more English teachers and another teacher retired this morning, and then someone else has to take medical disability, and I just don't know what's going to happen." Is that happening in schools around the country?

SHANKER: Yes, it's happening all across the country. It's not just the loss of teachers, because when you talk about it in those terms, there are human terms, and these are experienced people, losing jobs, but think of it in terms of what happens to a student. Up until now, if you had, let's say, 20 students who wanted to take a course in calculus or 17 who wanted to take Spanish or French or German. That was okay. The school would have a teacher and would say that's all right. But as you start tightening the budget, the principal says, "Look, you just can't put a class together unless you've got 30 students. If you don't have 30, you can't have that." So it's not just a question of teachers being dismissed. That's very important. But it's also the fact that when you have less money, you cannot offer the same curriculum offerings. They become too expensive unless you pack the classes. So class sizes get larger. Your counselling and library services go down and you can't have a rich curriculum unless you have a larger number of students who are going to pack each of those classes, and what it means to the average student is he's going to be in a larger class, not going to get the help needed when it's needed, and there won't be as many course offerings, so that it becomes a poorer, a less rich, education.

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers, a teacher union.

TEACHER: Now, look at the rules and regulations on page 8. One, be acceptable citizens who respect the rights of others by being trustworthy and showing respect for those in authority. Two, realize and accept the fact that conduct detrimental to the general welfare of others will not be tolerated. Three, students should not enter the building before 8:50 a.m., except in inclement weather, when the cafeteria is open and supervision is provided.

REINHARDT: Sound familiar? Reading the rules on the first day.

Seldom are students invited to ask why or suggest alternative rules.

MERROW: How do schools react when they're handed rules to follow?

REINHARDT: When, for instance, the federal government, in the form of the new Department of Education, imposes rules.

TOM SHANNON OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

SHANNON: The legislation establishing the new Department of Education specifically prohibits the Department from mandating any particular curriculum or course of study, which they have done.

MERROW: Is this a kind of camel putting his nose under the tent type thing?

SHANNON: It's more like the camel putting the nose, the head, the ears and part of the hump under the tent.

REINHARDT: Tom Shannon is head of the National School Boards Association. The regulations he refers to would require more bilingual instruction in the schools.

SHANNON: This does not mean that we're opposed to this bilingual or transitional English instruction. We are very much in favor of it, but what we are particularly in favor of from a standpoint of a concept or a principal is that the local school districts, in light of the unique circumstances in the community, develop their own bilingual or transitional language programs for the non-English speaking youngsters in their own communities. We don't think it's something that should be mandated from Washington, because there's no educational consensus on any particular approach.

MERROW: Even if it's a civil rights issue? That is a federal matter.

SHANNON: Oh, we're very concerned about the civil rights issue. We're very concerned that youngsters who don't speak English at home learn to speak English in the schools. We're very supportive of that. The point I'm making is is that there is no one approach to teaching these youngsters English, and the United States Department of Education arrogantly believes that there is.

REINHARDT: Shannon's group has organized a coalition to try to change the proposed regulations, which the Secretary of Education, Shirley Hufstedler, issued in August.

MERROW: The final regulations telling schools what services they must provide to children who are not proficient in English, won't be issued for months. You have until October 6th to suggest changes.

REINHARDT: Education Secretary Hufstedler says she's carrying out

the intent of Congress, and that the civil rights of non-English speaking children may be being violated. And she says requiring bi-lingual instruction for those who need it may be the best way.

EDUCATION SECRETARY SHIRLEY HUFSTEDLER SAYS THOSE RULES ARE CRUCIAL

HUFSTEDLER: It doesn't really help us, by the way, for people to say good grief, or isn't it terrible. What we're looking for is ways in which to reach the access problems of non-English proficient school children. In short, it doesn't do any good to say that's a terrible plan. What we need is not only simply screeches. What we want is significant help in drafting regulations.

MERROW: Maybe what's going on is kind of political. That is, the groups are organizing and they're making a public ruckus, to try to tone down the eventual final regulations.

HUFSTEDLER: I can't answer for what's in their minds. I can answer for what's in our minds. What's in our minds is that in order to implement Congressional policy, we are doing our best to find the reasonable and acceptable way by which we teach non-English speaking youngsters English as rapidly as possible, and at the same time to prevent those youngsters from falling behind their English speaking classmates in required subject matter while tne non-English proficient youngsters are learning English.

MERROW: You better speak to one charge, the specific one that you are dictating curriculum. That is in recommending or wanting to have bilingual education used as a method, you are recommending an approach to teaching which some people say has no basis in research data.

HUFSTEDLER: Well, let's talk about curriculum. In the first place, we're not dictating curriculum at all. It is the school districts and the states that determine what subjects shall be taught, what subjects shall be required. All we're saying is that you cannot invidiously discriminate against youngsters who are non-English proficient by in effect foreclosing their access to subject matter that you yourselves require.

MERROW: But the regulations say bilingual education for kids for whom English is not their primary language. Isn't bilingual education a curriculum, an approach to teaching?

HUFSTEDLER: It is an approach to teaching. What we're saying is these are the foundations on which we think we can appropriately build access to education by youngsters who are non-English proficient.

REINHARDT: The proposed regulations are being attacked by education groups as too restrictive. From the other side, several Hispanic groups want a stronger endorsement of bilingual education. That controversy may go on all year, and it will heat up if the Congress

becomes convinced that Washington bureaucrats are trying to give directions to local schools. The House of Representatives has already acted to stop the regulations from going through.

TEACHER READING ROLL

TEACHER: A person whose name that I call, if he's supposed to come and be in this class and you know that he's going to be here next week, please let me know. Or if you know that the person has gone to a private school or has moved, please let me know that.

Michelle Aberdeen?

ABERDEEN: Here.

TEACHER: Oh, wonderful. Pedro Bernal? No? Nobody knows about Pedro? Anthony Bradbee?

BRADBEE: Here.

TEACHER: Good. Eric Chambers.

CHAMBERS: Here.

TEACHER: Andre Cox? Rodriguez Diaz?

REINHARDT: Bilingual education isn't the only issue as schools reopen. Teacher morale may be dangerously low.

MERROW: A survey by the National Education Association, a teacher union, shows that about 40 percent of teachers would go into some other occupation if they had it to do over again.

REINHARDT: Many teachers say they are being asked to do too much, particularly with handicapped children. Terry Herndon of the National Education Association.

TERRY HERNDON OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

HERNDON: Well, we have a number of teachers who are just beside themselves with new responsibilities. They now have children with diverse handicaps in their classrooms. The statute sets up a requirement for individual educational plans, and that takes a good bit of their time and they've been provided no free time to meet that. The statute is very specific in terms of the rights of appeal for parents and students, but it is not specific in terms of what the teacher can do if a teacher believes the plan is inappropriate. So the teachers are very unhappy about all of those things, but I have very, very few teachers who come to me and say, "Repeal the law." What the teachers are saying is, "We need time and we need money to properly implement the law." They're angry and they're frustrated and they're anxiety laden, but they

do not favor repeal of the law, nor the exclusion of handicapped children from school.

REINHARDT: Terry Herndon, Executive Director of the National Education Association.

The law requires a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped children, regardless of cost, and the federal government pays considerably less than half the additional cost.

MERROW: The law also requires an individualized education plan, an IEP, for every handicapped child.

REINHARDT: The President of the other teacher union, Albert Shanker, has said that unless there's more federal money coming, schools can't afford programs for handicapped without slashing the regular curriculum.

ACCORDING TO AL SHANKER IT IS THE OTHER CHILDREN WHO LOSE OUT WHEN HANDICAPPED KIDS ARE MAINSTREAMED

SHANKER: You see, when you've got cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Toledo, San Francisco, laying off teachers and with class sizes getting larger and larger and guidance counsellors gone, and then in comes the federal government and says, "We are now mandating that you spend the following sums of money in order to test children invidually, to have private conferences and to do all these other things," I think that all these things are fine, but I think the federal government, when it says spend money for something ought to pay for it.

MERROW: The federal government doesn't mandate any of those things. It certainly doesn't mandate transferring money from one kid to another. It says a handicapped child has a right to a free and appropriate public education, the same as any other kid.

SHANKER: Oh, come on, stop kidding now. If a city is going bankrupt and it doesn't have any money, and the federal government comes along and says that you must have now an appropriate education for this handicapped child and the education for that child is going to cost three times or four times that for any other child in the school, now let's get this straight --

MERROW: You're misleading the audience. The federal government doesn't say do this. These are Constitutional rights these kids have. The federal government isn't obligated to pay for somebody's Constitutional rights. That's not the issue.

SHANKER: No, I am not mis-stating it at all. You've got a city like New York, which is on the verge of bankruptcy. You've got Cleveland, which is another. You've got Detroit. You've got Chicago. Now, let's be very practical. These places are finished. They are not doing anything in terms of their tax base, because if they raise taxes

they're going to drive additional citizens out of their cities and out of their states. They don't have any more money. They've got a fixed sum. As a matter of fact, they've got a declining sum of money, and when the federal government comes along and says, "We have now discovered a new set of Constitutional rights, and therefore you've got to spend money --," this is not a set of Constitutional rights that was written in the Constitution. It's a new interpretation, which I happen to agree with. But it does mandate a new set of expenditures, and in the city of New York, where 70,000 handicapped youngsters have now been found, and where by a consent decree, it costs three times as much to educate a handicapped child as it does to educate a non-handicapped child, it is the equivalent of finding a quarter of a million children in one city who have to be educated. Now, that has to be paid for, and where you don't have new taxes and where you can't raise the taxes and where the state isn't required to give you the money, where do you get it? I'll tell you where you get it. If you're a school board and you don't have taxing powers in New York City. The school board doesn't have taxing powers. And if the federal government says that one group of children has a Constitutional right to have this money spent on them, there's only one place you get that money and that's to take it away from other children. And I think that's the disaster.

And by the way, the federal government has renegged on its promise, as you very well know. They promised, when legislation passed in Washington, they promised that there would be a sum of money which would be increased each year so that the federal government would take care of at least part of the expenditure, an inadequate part, and they haven't done it. They have not done it.

MERROW: So let me interpret it. You're playing political hardball. You're saying it's going to be taken away from the normal kids unless the federal government comes up with the money.

SHANKER: I'm not saying it's going to. I'm saying it has been and it is being taken away. Today, as I am speaking, there are millions of children who are having less money spent on their education and the money that they would have had is spent on other children's education who have a right to an education as well, and it's because the federal government has not met its promises and its commitments.

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. In fiscal 1980, the federal government is providing $2 billion for edûcating the handicapped. The fiscal 1981 budget provides nearly $2,200,000,000.00.

KIDS FINDING THEIR WAY IN THEIR NEW SCHOOL

STUDENT: You don't go to art today. You don't go to art today. See, today's Thursday.

STUDENT: All right. So I go next week sometimes.

STUDENT: So you've got to go here, because today's Thursday.

STUDENT: Yes, I'll go there today.

STUDENT: Yeah, you go there. He told me.

STUDENT: Uh-huh. I go there twice.

STUDENT: I don't like English.

STUDENT: I hate English.

STUDENT: Me too.

TEACHER: Let me see this. That's 203.

STUDENT: Okay. Which way do I go?

TEACHER: Okay. Go up, follow the corridor, make a left turn, and it will be in the center of the building. It will be to your right as you go down the --

MERROW: Lost, confused 7th graders on the first day of school. Some things never change.

REINHARDT: Critics say schools ought to change but are unable to.

MERROW: One piece of evidence from a new report, 70 years ago first graders had a vocabulary of about 1,000 words, while today's first graders typically know 8,000 words. But the first grade curriculum then, 70 years ago, and now, teaches 350 new words. No change.

REINHARDT: We took our question, are schools outmoded, to two defenders of public education, Tom Shannon, representing school boards, and Terry Herndon of the teachers' union. First, Tom Shannon.

TOM SHANNON AND TERRY HERNDON DISCUSS WHETHER OR NOT TODAY'S SCHOOLS ARE OUTMODED

SHANNON: If you look at the curriculum today and contrast, not compare, contrast it to what it was just 25 years ago, the difference is amazing. We offer more courses. The people who teach the courses are substantially better qualified than they've ever been before. In fact I take the position that our teachers and school administrators are the best professionally equipped that they've ever been in the history not of this country, but of the world. We require more of them going in. We require more of them staying in. As a matter of fact, I believe instead of 1980 being a year for a decline in public education, I think it's going to be -- it's going to witness the

beginning of the renaissance of public education, especially if the best hopes that we have for the new United States Department of Education are -- bear fruit.

HERNDON: I'm not familiar with the numbers you give me, about 1,000 as opposed to 8,000 words in the pre-school child's vocabulary, but I do know that children today have been exposed to a lot more than they ever were, and I'm willing to accept that they have a higher level beginning vocabulary on the average. But all that does is elevate the standard for literacy, and we still need the school to bring children to whatever that standard is, and as the average goes up, the problem of dealing with those who have been disadvantaged and do not meet that standard become more complex and more difficult.

MERROW: I don't think you're speaking to the issue, though, of whether schools are changing in response to the kids who are coming in with new needs and with new abilities.

HERNDON: I've been speaking to that issue all my career, John. I don't believe that schools have changed as rapidly as they ought to change, and I believe that there are serious problems in the schools, but I don't believe that we're going to make a positive social contribution by destroying those schools. The fact that so much of our criticism is vented towards the school I think is a reflection of the public's observation that they need schools that respond to those changes. I agree that they have not. I have said myself a number of times that I'm not aware of any public policy body, a school board, a state legislature, the United States Congress, who has ever sat down and looked at the many changes that have occurred in the lives of young people over the last two decades, and then addressed the question what implication does this have for the schools. That is not done. It's a whole new world today. The family is different. The child is different. The neighborhood is different. Social needs are different. And we have no systematic planning mechanism to decide how the schools ought to respond to that.

MERROW: Are you willing to say that schools are better than ever?

HERNDON: I believe they are, yes.

REINHARDT: Terry Herndon of the National Education Association.

MERROW: Herndon and Tom Shannon sometimes disagree because one represents labor and the other management, but both speak as professional educators.

REINHARDT: Noboby speaks for all parents. That's probably impossible, but one group that tires to represent parent interests is the National Committee for Citizens Education. Co-Director Stan Salett says there are some things parents can do to improve their

child's school.

STAN SALETT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR CITIZENS IN EDUCATION

SALETT: Rather than visit a classroom when a problem arises, parents should at the outset of the school year establish a pattern of response and communication with the school and the teacher that they can carry on through the school year. Most teachers feel that their greatest strength are supportive parents, and support at home really has great payoff for what they're trying to do in the classroom. And many teachers will tell me that one of the differences they sense in their own experience is that they feel that parents have less and less time to participate in school activities, to come to meetings. And it's true that we have many more single parents and many more two parent working families than we ever had before. So that the time available to parents and to teachers is very precious, and that's why it has to be organized in a better fashion than it ever has been before.

MERROW: You seem to be arguing almost for a kind of contract, or at least an understanding between the parent and the teacher, on what they are going to do together to help the child. Should the child be part of it?

SALETT: Yes, I think that definitely the child is a part of it and should be a part of it, because they are after all the object of the contract itself. Others have talked about such a contract. Jesse Jackson has talked about a parent-teacher contract. We have written something called an annual educational checkup card.

MERROW: Tell me about that. Tell me about that, because we have one right here. I mean this -- these are kind of questions that I can ask about the school itself, have I gotten this material and so on.

SALETT: Yes. We start with the analogy of the checkup, an education checkup as a medical checkup. If your child's health is as important to you as it should be, then you would naturally take your child to see a doctor once a year. We think that your child's schooling should be at least as important as your child's health, and so we feel at least one visit to the school, which we would call an annual educational checkup. We obviously advise many more visits than one. But in any case, each visit to your child's school should be preceded by a review of all the material that the school usually sends home, or your child brings home. Report cards, any special reports, any school papers. We think that each parent should keep a file at home on the child and use that as the basic material for preparation for a parent-teacher conference. Then, in preparation, further preparation, for the conference, think about specific questions you want to ask. Is your child performing at grade level. What is meant by grade level. What are the various tests that are now being provided during this coming school year. What about achievement tests, intelligence tests. Does

my child need any special help. In what area. How is the school proposing to provide the special help.

MERROW: Stan, here's a question I bet most questions ask, of themselves, anyway, they may not say it out loud. Is the school safe. How can you find out? How can a parent know?

SALETT: The best way is to go in and spend some time in the school, to try to find out. The second way is to talk to other parents of children at the school and find out what their experiences are. Schools that have had high incidences of violence and lack of safety have been definitely improved where parents have organized, come together, talked about their mutual concerns, come to the school and participated in a more general school program designed to lower the level of violence and make the schools more safe. It's often one thing to have a school safety monitor in a corridor, trying to control safety in the -- in the school, and something quite different to have a parent in the same situation who knows the child, who knows the parents of the child, who can say, "I know your family. I know that they don't like your behaving that way and I'm going to do something about it." It's, again, the tying together of the home and the school.

MERROW: You're trying to end the isolation of schools.

SALETT: Yes. I think educators increasingly are beginning to realize that parents are the great underused resource in American education, and they do represent a positive influence.

MERROW: And I as a parent have every right to go in to talk to my kid's teachers and find out what their educational philosophy is, what their work requirements are going to be, to tell them about my kids and to get into a dialogue with them.

SALETT: Yes. And if you don't do it nobody else will.

REINHARDT: Stan Salett, of the National Committee for Citizens in Education in Columbia, Maryland. The Committee has a book coming out, "You Can Improve Your Child's School."

MERROW: It also has an education checkup card which it's giving away free.

REINHARDT: In fact, we'll send one to anyone who writes us at National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: That's the address to write to if you'd like the printed transcript of this program. It and our companion program on going off to college costs $2.00.

REINHARDT: The cassette recording of the programs is also available

for $6.00.

MERROW: Our address again, for the transcript, the cassette, the free education checkup, or just the free list of past Options in Education programs, is National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

TEACHER: Lugo, Carlos. Sharon Tang --

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REINHARDT: Options in Education is written and produced by John Merrow. Mary Rouse is our Associate Producer and Rebecca Goldfield is our Assistant Producer. Technical assistance for this program by Dennis Nielson and Craig Laird.

TEACHER: Michelle Mantz. Sylvia Mazaregos. Joshua Marrow.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

REINHARDT: I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: This is NPR, National Public Radio.